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4/27/77  
RS 110 B

"BEHOLD THE KING!"

You have heard the commandment...  
but I say unto you....

Over the Easter break I found myself reading the gospel account left by the apostle Matthew. The style of the writing itself was quite different from that of the gospel according to Mark. Many of the details left out by Mark seem to be filled in by Matthew. The personalities of the Apostles are more true-to-life. The lyrics that Jesus spoke produce the kind of awe one would expect the Messiah to produce. The customs and traditions of the people are brought out into the open. One can easily see the lavishly robed doctors of the Law disputing a minute precept of the Torah; arms waving in every direction giving the enraged speaker emphasis to set up the essential points of his rhetoric. At a turn one could see the confused masses desiring to follow any obscure individual willing to promise victory over the Romans. The land of Israel is alive in the pages of Matthew's gospel.

I feel another reason why Matthew's gospel is so real to me is because of my own personal experience. Three years ago, as a sophomore in high school, I felt the need for a change in my life. I suppose I could relate very well to the children of Israel. I had an honest desire to do what was right, but I just didn't have the capacity to do it. It was an extremely frustrating situation, as it must have been for Jesus' early followers. There he was in their midst, the Messiah, the Son of David. They could converse with him, point-

ing out different citations in the Law. But when it came to probing the deeper points of his "kerygma" and even more when it came to attempting to live out his words they come out empty handed. Frustrated, confused, sheep without a shepherd, they asked for bread for their bellies when they should have asked for the everlasting bread that he was offering to them, a bread that would satisfy the hunger-pangs of the heart. I too desired that form of nourishment. And in a very unconventional way, at least for a Catholic, I found satisfaction.

Like Jesus' casual request for Matthew to follow him a friend approached me one evening with a similar question. He simply turned to me and said, "Joe, the Lord has something very special for you. He wants to give you the strength to overcome your trials. Would you like to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?"

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --  
I took the one less traveled by  
And that has made all the difference.  
- Robert Frost

It is sad to me that my experience is not as common as I would hope. Many of my Catholic brothers and sisters live out their ritualistic religious existence in the same manner as the Jews in Jesus' day. Here we are, Catholics, with our valid spiritual teachings openly manifested in various observances and traditions. Yet, their reality and significance is not found growing in us, it doesn't seem to be alive in us. But it is dictated to us. We are told that they are real, but their reality remains in another realm. Who is to blame for this shortcoming, if in fact there is a shortcoming? Our religious instructors? Our pastors? Our parents? We alone are at fault.

To you the mystery of the reign of God has been  
 confided. To the others outside it is all pre-  
 sented in parable.

- Mark 4.11

Getting back to Matthew's gospel, during the first few months after my "religious experience" Matthew's gospel was my first source of religious education. Because the group that I first associated with was very much into the "This is the Last Generation" syndrome, the eschatological passages found in Matthew chapters twenty-four and twenty-five produce many "fond memories."

As the weeks turned into months and the months into years I met headlong the maze of Protestant "Last Day" theories. First it was the "Pretribulation Rapturist" theory, then the "Premillennial Literal Reign" theory, then the "Amillennial" theory, and so forth. Being the inquisitive student that I am ( at least in some subjects) I weighed the Biblical evidence against their skillfully devised systems of interpretation. After a few months I found myself skipping from one theory to another until, in a state of much despair, I completely abandoned my quest for eschatological truth.

After a year or so I returned to the eschatological passages found in Matthew ( I didn't even touch the Book of Revelation) in an attempt to reconcile myself to the meaning behind these discourses. The result of this investigation was one basic principle: the imminent return of the Messiah. One can argue until that very day as to whether chapter twenty-four was totally fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in seventy A.D. or if it remains to be fulfilled. one can lose one's mental equilibrium arguing about the symbolism in the parable of the ten virgins; why were five wise and five foolish, what was the meaning of the phrase "The foolish ones ...brought no oil along,"



what does the oil symbolize? The questions are limitless but this one thing is clear in this ocean of greys and greens: "Keep your eyes open, for you know not the day or the hour" (Mt.25.13). John adds a bit more when he writes:

Dearly beloved,  
 we are God's children now;  
 what we shall later be has not yet come to light.  
 We know that when it comes to light we shall  
     be like him,  
 for we shall see him as he is.  
     Everyone who has this hope based on him  
 keeps himself pure, as he is pure.  
     - 1 John 3.2-3

One final note that holds special significance to me. In Matthew's gospel Jesus is presented as the promised Messiah, the One that the people had been waiting for. He isn't presented as establishing a new order so much as he is presented as completing or fulfilling the old order. And that is what he has done for me. I was born and raised a Catholic, knowing right from wrong, and knowing the basic principles of my faith. But it wasn't until the Messiah was welcomed into my life as the living Savior that these practices had any powerful significance. It wasn't until I made a conscious submission to his kingship that I became a recognized subject of the Kingdom of God.

"All this happened to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet....  
 ...and you are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.  
     - Matthew 1.22,21b

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